

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 464 287

CG 031 707

AUTHOR Johnson, Sharon K.; Johnson, C. D.  
TITLE Future Student Support Programs: Distinction or Extinction?  
PUB DATE 2002-05-00  
NOTE 13p.; In: Building Stronger School Counseling Programs: Bringing Futuristic Approaches into the Present; see CG 031 688.  
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; \*Change; Elementary Secondary Education; \*Futures (of Society); \*Program Development; Pupil Personnel Services; \*School Counseling; Student Personnel Services

## ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews changes for the future of student support programs identified and addressed by other contributing authors. It is proposed that without a blueprint of how the fields of school counseling, psychology, nursing, social work, and other student support programs will change to address the future, extinction is guaranteed. Changes already occurring that affect the student support programs of the future are highlighted. These include changes in the areas of local communities; computer technology; family structures; educational organization; the economy; and models of leadership. Finally, realignments of available resources must be evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure the paradigms being used are delivering planned-for results in terms of academic achievement and wellness program implementation. (Contains 12 references.) (GCP)

# Future Student Support Programs: Distinction or Extinction?

By

Sharon K. Johnson  
C. D. Johnson

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# Future Student Support Programs: Distinction or Extinction?

*Sharon K. Johnson & C. D. Johnson*

All contributing authors have identified and addressed changes for the future of student support programs from their perspectives. It becomes clear when speaking with student support professionals that without a blueprint of how the fields of school counseling, psychology, nursing, social work, attendance work, and other student support programs will change to address the future, extinction is guaranteed. Major changes are already occurring that affect the student support programs of the future.

## Communities

In the present and in the future, a return to local communities will be common. "The global community of the future will be at its best a series of communities that are interdependent and diverse, embracing differences, releasing energy, and building cohesion" (Hesselbein, Goldsmith, Beckhard, & Schubert, 1998, p. xi). This return to a smaller, more knowable community reflects the basic need of humans to belong. The community includes families and homes, classrooms and schools, churches and recreation areas, and neighborhood businesses and industries. Currently, communities are being constructed around common missions and values, with the objectives of reducing gang involvement and increasing communication and collaboration among community members. The larger communities include towns, states, and nations—the political entities to which allegiance is pledged.

The student support professionals become a community within each educational community, addressing the needs of

families, schools, neighborhoods, and other groups that constitute the whole. "Building the global community of the future is not the work of tomorrow. We are each called to build it today—to build it now" (Hesselbein et al., 1998, p. xiv). For student support professionals, the change in community focus is significant because it mandates that counselors give up a circumscribed role and learn to collaborate more effectively with others who make up the student support team. The student support team will become a more diverse community group, including more than just the traditional counselor, psychologist, nurse, and social worker. Ensuring that students are prepared to assume a productive role in the new community will necessarily involve an expanded focus on contributions, responsibilities, experiences, and opportunities outside the 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. school day, outside the school building, and with adults other than just professional educators. Given the current limited focus, student support staff members will need additional skills and, perhaps, mentoring experiences to expand their view of the possibilities within each community.

### **Computer Technology**

Distance education is already an element of local educational institutions, including public schools and universities. The computer allows for more home schooling for students who learn better at home, for disruptive youth, and for academically accelerated youth. School-home communication by e-mail is already being used for auditing students' progress in academics, assisting with educational and career preparation, and sending report cards. Universities and many high schools have students and their parents enroll in classes through the use of telephone-computer technology. Teaching-learning style matching is now simplified by using available technology that we hope leads to better academic achievement. The information explosion has already accelerated cognitive growth and has caused a rise in national academic standards.

Acquiring the necessary competencies in interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships appears to be the area most neglected in this technological age. The coming years will bring a proliferation of interactive, voice-activated technology that can be designed to enhance social interaction skills among participants. Cameras attached to computer screens are available to allow users to see whom they are addressing. This technology

will become common and may reduce the impersonal nature of computers. Kurzweil (1999) indicates that by 2009 computers will be embedded in our clothes, and the average household will have more than one hundred computers, and by 2019 they will be placed in our bodies. Use of computers to streamline paperwork formerly assigned to student support personnel has already begun, but attention will need to be refocused on how students can utilize computers for academic learning without losing the essential skills of getting along with others, being part of a learning community, contributing to others, and fulfilling their interpersonal needs for connection and belonging. If schools are allowed to focus only on academic achievement, leaving relationship-building to the family and community, many students will face a bleak, impersonal, and unfulfilling future. Counselors must assume leadership in helping educators find new ways to reach beyond computer technology to focus on the human being at the core of the learning process.

### **Families**

There appears to be a return to the traditional family structure of original parents—that is, a reduction in divorces. However, most families will continue to have both parents employed in order to live their desired lifestyle. The fast-food craze may become a way of life, with more healthful prepared meals delivered to the home. Current developments in the health field indicate that individuals will visit health sites on a regular basis and, through submission of a blood sample, receive an individualized health plan with suggested meals, supplements, vitamins, and exercise regimens. Improved health awareness, as well as active involvement in school achievement, may become a family, school, and employer concern. Schools will extend their hours to incorporate family education options as well as wellness, recreational, and avocational activities. As families gain awareness of their importance within a school community, the family as a group will increase cohesiveness and participation in cooperative ventures.

The increased interactions among multiple cultures will affect how families view themselves, their collective roles, and their contributions within the larger community. These collaborations may result in healthier, more connected families with common goals and interests. New rituals of communication and interaction are needed to replace the traditional separation

of families and schools. Shopping malls have become social centers. If schools take leadership in providing a focal point within the community, however, the role of counselors will become paramount in helping to structure positive and productive conversations within and between families, with families and schools working together to establish the family vision and the unique missions of each individual and family. Research clearly indicates that the more the family is involved in a student's education, the greater the student's success (Henderson & Berda, 1994). Traditionally there has been clear separation between home and school. It will become the counselor's responsibility to break down the separating walls and find new ways to integrate and support collaborative relationships between school and home, acknowledging the importance of each.

### Education

Some believe that the current school organizations will never change regardless of what research has to contribute: The 50-minute class period and the 6 or 7 period-a-day schedule in high schools, the single-teacher classroom in elementary schools, the bus schedules, and the support schedules will be maintained because they serve a community function. It seems that students have fewer electives, causing more youth to leave high school without a regular or traditional diploma. There are fewer skill-related classes to prepare students to enter the workforce. Rituals in schooling that were established in the early 1990s have been difficult, if not impossible, to change. It has been said that there have been no substantive changes in the delivery of education in the last 100 years. Yet, the National Education Commission on Time and Learning (1994) found that the fixed clock and calendar is a hindrance to education reform and must be changed. They further believe that the schedule must be modified to respond to the changes that have reshaped and are reshaping American life outside school. "In the United States, we've concentrated on getting students ready for the next grade or pushing them into the university. And that's not the same as preparing them for a technological, information-based society" (Daggett, 1994).

The imminent changes in technology, families, and community may be the catalyst for significant changes that have been touted in many reform movements during the last 20 years.

More personalized educational plans and offerings, more efficient organizational structures, and more room for parent and community participation are key elements that promise meaningful change in student outcomes. Within the educational reform movement of the 1990s, mention of student support programs was conspicuously absent. Unless counselors assume leadership in defining their contributions to education as it changes, student support professionals from a variety of backgrounds will step in to fill the needs. This trend has already begun with nonschool professionals being utilized for specialized projects such as family counseling, safe school initiatives, drug and alcohol projects, teen suicide response teams, and a variety of other specially funded efforts. Counselors must demonstrate the importance of coordination and collaboration of efforts to ensure that all students receive the assistance they needed to become successful as students and in the future roles they will assume.

### **The Economy**

The world economy is consistently growing in scope and quantity. The results are a massive growth in mergers and closures, fewer middle managers, a transient workforce, and an ever-increasing gap between those with money and those without, making the middle-class workforce smaller and smaller. The need for universal work skills is visible. The growth of world economies portends a more international scope in work, travel, lifestyles, and education. Student support personnel will need to identify clear, attainable student competencies related to comprehensive educational expectations in order to guide students toward relevant goals and plans.

Employees are expected to be mobile, to change not only types of employment but also locations. Companies now hire full-time temporary employees, thus cutting costs. There are few middle managers, leading to an increase in lower paid workers. Many firms hire consultants for specific jobs, which allows for cost savings but also requires worker mobility. There is a dramatic increase in the number of individuals who work out of their home, as both entrepreneurs and employees. These trends imply the expectation of lifelong learning competencies. As the economy changes, technology advances, and communities evolve, new worker skills are necessary. Therefore, family involvement in education is not limited to children and



adolescents but can and does involve all family members. Counselors become essential in helping students and families adapt to the diversity around them, to embrace differences, and to see themselves as competent in meeting the many economic and work roles they will be expected to fulfill.

### **Results Orientation**

Industries, businesses, education units, and many social and government agencies are demanding the achievement of specified results. The leaders demand quality, and they are almost always on a quota system themselves for product development. The current economy, with its many investors, has a forceful impact on top management's decision making, leading to closing businesses, moving manufacturing to other countries, or simply closing plants to reduce costs, thereby causing unemployment, worker mobility, or worker retraining. These actions affect employees and their families.

### **Leadership**

The face of leadership has changed from the traditional military and sports models to a participative, inclusive management model of organizations (Senge, 1990). The increasing number of women in upper management positions has had an impact on the type of management skills required to maintain learning organizations. More time is being spent in planning, using the total quality management (TQM) processes, and in addressing continuous changes. As work-related leadership skills change, so do the parenting skills utilized at home. Providing opportunities for input from all workers provides a model for managing family groups. The use of family meetings, the practice of listening to all views, and development of a vision and goals for each family member and for the family as a whole have been suggested as winning strategies for the families of the future. Student support personnel need to become leaders in the school culture in order to effectively advocate for students and their families. As school leadership evolves into more collaborative team efforts, student support professionals need to become active in leading the way: teaching others how to listen, reflect, and clarify; sharing group process skills, such as those required for effective meetings; and developing and teaching other competencies that are a part of counselor training



programs. Leaders find a way to adapt their skills to meet the needs of the group and each individual. Who better than counselors to fulfill this role?

How do these changes reflect the development of a coherent ecology? The concept of ecology speaks to the pattern of relations between living things and their environments, or to the interdependence of all organisms as manifest by community development and structure. Coherent means to be "logically consistent and ordered to become fittingly connected or unified by certain principles, relationships or themes in the pursuit of one purpose or idea" (Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1981).

Thus, educational changes must be integrated into the life of each community, large or small, if that community is to move ahead in a chosen direction. The development of coherent ecology mandates creation and acceptance of a shared mission, vision, and values; the opportunity to seek new methods, reflect on the results, and make additional adaptations; willingness to work in collaborative teams, learning from one another and creating momentum to fuel continued improvement; willingness to act, to experiment, and sometimes to fail in order to change and improve; as well as the encouragement of continuous improvement and striving for positive results. Coherent ecology bespeaks communities that are growing, vital, alive, and welcoming. We must learn that "whatever is flexible and flowing will tend to grow and whatever is rigid and blocked will atrophy and die" (Heider, 1985, p. 151).

Using available information on what is happening and what is projected, the opportunity has been created to suggest different metaphors or models for use in moving student support personnel professionals forward, heuristically changing their icalf paths to better meet new community values and conditions. Metaphors offer professionals the means to examine what they are doing compared to what they might be or will be doing in future years if they are to avoid extinction.

Each of the contributors to this book offers the reader different ways of examining what the contributions might be for each member of the student support team—counselor, nurse, psychologist, social worker, teacher, administrator, and other active members, including community members.

The professional learning community consists of numerous individuals who provide support services for youth from birth to age 18 (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). They may be assigned to different organizations and in different locations within the

community. The student support professionals within the learning community might include social workers, nurses and other health specialists, school psychologists and counselors, other mental health workers, and counseling and clinical psychologists. In addition there may be family center personnel and recreational specialists. Using this information, there are numerous potential paradigms that might be considered "outside the box." These are offered as ideas to stimulate creativity.

1. Collaborative teams will be the resource to break down territorial boundaries among professionals, leading to a career lattice with a single mission: the educational achievement and mental health of all youth.
2. The teams may be assigned case management for families that have one or more children, working with those children from birth to 18 years of age or older. The team will be accountable for the children learning to learn, to work, to relate, to contribute to the community, and to maintain a balance of activities that provides a sense of wellness.
3. The teams might be organized to require collaboration with other community entities. The team leader will be selected on competence of leadership and not title or degree, such as school psychologist, school counselor, social worker, or administrator.
4. The student support team will be charged with implementing a comprehensive results-based student support program that centers on academic achievement for all students pre-K through grade 12 (or graduation from high school) or through grades 13 and 14, if not through four years of college.
5. School leadership will have to realign professional assignments in order to provide assistance for home schoolers, for those involved in distance learning, for those in college-high school programs, and for those students attending school in industries and businesses where their parents are working.
6. More districts may be contracting with out-of-school consultants for specific results and purposes, such as college planning, career planning, personal counseling, and mental health needs. Therefore, the school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and administrators will need competencies in managing others in the student support program areas.

7. Career ladders will cause current college and university preparation for student support personnel to change as well as expand. There are models of career ladders available; however, the future student support program career ladder will require a unique approach with clearly defined steps based on competence rather than specific educational degrees.
8. Parental involvement in students' education may take a different path, one in which parents are mandated to participate in certain functions planned to assist them in helping their children to achieve specific competencies related to preparing their children to become contributing citizens.
9. Schools may once again assume the role of being the center of the community life, because schools are the most permanent social institution. However, this change will necessitate changes in scope and flexibility.
10. Private practitioners will be a prime source of expertise for students and families in need. It may become common for schools to contract with clinical and counseling psychologists for ongoing assistance.

### **Conclusion**

There are many possibilities for realigning available resources to provide better and more results without additional funding. The realignments must be evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure the paradigms being used are delivering planned-for results in terms of academic achievement and wellness program implementation. These new paradigms must move us from established educational patterns into new, dynamic paradigms for the future. Student support programs will by necessity be different from what we know today, if they are to survive in the new millennium. Human beings are genetically encoded to grow and change—the challenge ahead is to make the educational and support communities flexible enough to accommodate the many environmental and human changes that lie ahead.

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## About the Authors

**C. D. "Curly" Johnson, Ph.D.**, has been a consultant for more than 30 years in the areas of education, counseling, mental health, and business. Currently president of Professional Update, an educational and business consulting firm, Dr. Johnson has consulted in 30 states and 16 countries on a variety of programs, including results-based school counseling, marriage and family counseling, student development, group counseling, and school-home partnerships. He has authored and co-authored books and articles in the areas of at-risk students and potential dropouts, family practices, parent-school partnerships, group leadership, therapeutic techniques, career development, program evaluation, and management for results. He resides and runs an active consultant practice from his residence in San Juan Capistrano, California. Dr. Johnson is the recipient of several achievement awards from national and state professional associations including PTA, NCDA, CACD, and CASC.

**Sharon K. Johnson, Ed.D.**, is retired from her position as professor and coordinator of the Counseling and Educational Leadership Program within the Division of Administration and Counseling at California State University, Los Angeles. She has consulted nationally and internationally with educational and business organizations, as well as co-authoring articles and books in the areas of parent-school partnerships; group counseling; program development and evaluation; management training; marriage, family, and child counseling; career development; and multicultural issues. Dr. Johnson is a former teacher and school counselor, and was director of pupil services for the Howard County Public Schools in Maryland for 10 years. She has been active in many national and state professional associations, including PDK, AAUW, ASCD, AERA, and multiple divisions of ACA, representing group work specialists, counselor educators and supervisors, career development professionals, and school counselors. She is past president of the California Association of Counselor Educators and Supervisors, the Los Angeles chapter of Phi Delta Kappa, and the California Association for Counseling and Development.



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